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ABSTRACT

A brief introduction describing the planning process for the meeting, reports from five discussion groups, a summary of their findings, and conclusions are provided for a pre-conference on the theme, Library and Information Services for Increasing International Understanding and Cooperation. The nearly 100 participants, who met to exchange ideas, to clarify salient issues in this area, and to recommend program elements and priorities for the White House Conference, represented government, educational, and business groups. The five discussion groups considered the present state of international information flow, overcoming barriers to international information flow, the impact of current technology in international information exchange, economic aspects of international information exchange, and uses and users of information internationally. Twelve major issues were identified during the group deliberations, and from these, five priority issues of greatest relevance to the purpose and objectives of the White House Conference were selected: (1) coordination of U.S. information policies with worldwide developments, (2) creation of a mechanism for coordinating U.S. information policies, (3) improvement of acquisition of foreign materials for the U.S., (4) assessment of the impact of technology on the availability of information, and (5) improvement of standards for facilitating international flow. (SW)

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INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION EXCHANGE

A Theme Conference Summary

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White House Conference on Library and Information Services

Pre-Conference Meetings on Special Themes

July 31, 1979

International Information Exchange

A Theme Conference Summary

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INTRODUCTION

In authorizing the White House Conference on Library and Information Services, Congress stressed that "access to information and ideas is indispensable to the development of human potential, the advancement of civilization, and the continuance of enlightened self-government." As the designers of the Conference reflected on its rationale, as set forth in Public Law 93-568, and on the more than 3,000 recommendations developed during 57 State, territorial, and special pre-Conference sessions, it became apparent that there were international dimensions to the library and information services being used by American citizens.

The initial step in determining which areas concerned with international information exchange should be addressed at the Conference was to convene a planning meeting at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) on May 22, 1979. This session focused on a number of activities and issues that might receive priority and be prepared as program elements for the White House Conference. Following the admonition by Charles Benton, chairman of NCLIS, that "we cannot discuss library and information services as if they stopped at our national borders," six brief presentations provided essential information on existing international information activities.

First, an overview of international organizations and programs was presented by Judith Werdel of the NAS Commission on International Relations. Her discussion included useful information on the goals and objectives for U.S. involvement in international information activities developed by the NAS Commission on International Scientific and Technical Information Programs (CISTIP) and insight into how U.S. information professionals and organizations participate in international information activities.

Valdimir Slamecka of the Georgia Institute of Technology, focused on U.S. computer and communications industries and the problems inherent in their competition with similar foreign groups; and on information as a resource that needs to have a value placed on it within the international marketplace.

David Hersey, president of the Smithsonian Science Information Exchange (SSIE), addressed the role of the private sector in international information flow. He noted that private industry, unwilling to wait for often-slow government action, has begun its own efforts to make library and information resources available outside the United States. Among these offerings are requisite hardware, software, training programs, and specific databases. Hersey emphasized the need for a more balanced flow of information between the United States and other nations.

Henriette Avram, director of the Network Development Office at the Library of Congress (LC), pointed out that LC's acquisitions and cataloging program has to some extent proliferated the use of foreign information. Her second concern was the importance of standards, and that there should be no difference between library and information services. Avram indicated that international copyright is important and difficult; she stressed that the private sector must be compensated for its efforts in collecting and disseminating information.

Library and information services that are available to the handicapped were described by Kurt Cylke, director of LC's National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. He observed that the most sophisticated information systems to serve the handicapped exist abroad and that our Nation needs to be made aware of such technological advances.

Frank McGowan, director of LC's Acquisitions and Overseas Operations, described programs that acquire publications for use by American scholars and furnish catalogs of foreign material.

In addition to these focal points, related issues were identified during the subsequent general discussion, including:

-- support of the proposed addendum to the Florence Agreement to eliminate tariffs from publications, audiovisual materials, microfilms, and special items for the handicapped,

-- exemption of Canada from the manufacturing clause of the Copyright Act of 1976, allowing American authors to publish their books first in Canada if they so desire,

-- international standardization affecting the free flow of information, including U.S. long-range financing,

-- recognition that international information flow is no longer an elitist function; and

-- discussion of the need for tighter controls on technology transfer (and related information items).

Robert Wedgeworth, executive director of the American Library Association, cited the importance of articulating to Conference delegates the basis and significance of these international information issues, specifically as they may enhance U.S. interests (as opposed to purely technical considerations).

A special task force, composed of David Hersey (SSIE), Jane Bortnick (Congressional Research Service), and Jenny Johnson (International Division of American Educational and Communications Technology), developed the structure, procedural guidelines, and suggested topics for the pre-Conference meeting on "International Information Exchange."

Nearly one hundred persons, representing government, educational, and business groups, convened at the U.S. Department of State on July 31, 1979, to exchange ideas, to clarify salient issues in this complex area, and to recommend program elements and priorities for the White House Conference in November.

The overall rationale for devoting one of five Conference themes to the role of library and information services in fulfilling international responsibilities and maximizing the exchange of significant information was articulated by Charles Benton, NCLIS chairman.

-- National policies must be formulated to ensure continued U.S. leadership in creating, managing, and operating those information networks involving other nations that are of potential benefit to American business and commerce.

-- Information increasingly is considered a resource and a "commodity" in many sectors of our society and by many other countries; it is imperative that the concepts and priorities of those charged with providing library and information services be heeded and reflected in relevant policies and programs.

-- There are international ramifications regarding such critical issues as "protection of privacy," safeguarding certain data, and "freedom of information," which are undeniable and must be resolved by the best available talent.

-- The impact of information technology is universal, and hence its role in affecting library and information services demands an international frame of reference.

-- U.S. research libraries now receive 60 percent of their new material from foreign sources.

-- Global well-being and cooperation depend increasingly on the development and sharing of critical information resources, including those used in economic and social welfare planning, those used to optimize agricultural

production, those established to cope with natural and manmade disasters, or those drawn upon to reflect important demographic trends.

DISCUSSION GROUP REPORTS

Participants covered five major areas of concern in separate discussion groups comprised of 12 to 20 experienced professionals in the information field. Final reports and group discussion moderated by Dale Baker, director of Chemical Abstracts Service, identified the important issues, offered specific recommendations, and included relevant commentary.

Overview of the Present State of International Information Flow

In Discussion Group 1 there was general agreement that international information dynamics and new information resources would dictate the directions that all countries must follow in information system and library development. The group stressed that the United States has traditionally had a rather insular approach to information issues, and what has been done on an international basis, in many cases, has been a byproduct rather than a principal objective of official U.S. efforts.

Issues

-- The need to identify current international information/communications policy issues that affect libraries and information services,

-- The importance of relating current U.S. policies -- Government and non-Government -- to information development worldwide,

-- The possible creation of a mechanism in the United States to coordinate Government and private sector information/ communications policy to deal with major international information issues,

-- The encouragement and improvement of transborder data flow to the nations that lack information, and

-- The improved selection and maintenance of adequate collections of materials from international sources.

Recommendations

-- The current information policies of the United States need reexamination since most were developed in the past and have not been updated.

-- The United States should encourage and facilitate information flow to less developed countries, not only from our Nation, but from other nations as well.

-- Information has to flow in both directions, i.e., between the industrialized nations and the less developed nations.

-- Information considered sensitive by the Government and private sector should be dealt with separately since the proprietary rights of the private sector are tremendously important to the economic well-being of the United States.

-- Modern information and technology from foreign sources should be analyzed and used more effectively to increase productivity and to encourage innovation in the United States.

Commentary

-- The United States has traditionally made available overseas information produced by the Government or under Government contract; however, in other countries such information remains, for the most part, proprietary.

-- Until recently, the United States has tended to ignore foreign technology. Today, many realize that in some areas foreign technology is equal to or better than ours and can be useful in enhancing U.S. productivity and in encouraging innovation.

-- A number of alternative mechanisms could be recommended for coordinating international information policy. This is a problem that the Federal Government has not addressed in terms of its information programs, much less in terms of a national perspective that would include the private sector.

-- An increasing number of people around the world, particularly those in the United States, are taking steps to control the technologies that affect their lives through such means as technology assessment and social management of technology. Either there is something different about information technology vis-a-vis other technologies, or people involved in information technology have not recognized the pervasiveness of this trend.

-- It can be argued that information technology is not similar to many other technologies, and the tremendous growth and impact of information technology in all

countries over the past 10 years reflects this distinction.

-- Too often in the creation of information systems and libraries, the technology is considered first, rather than users' needs and wants.

-- To take advantage fully of the new information technology, less developed countries have to have an information infrastructure and trained information professionals who can effectively access and process needed materials.

Overcoming Barriers to International Information Flow

Discussion Group 2 cited specific examples of legislation, conferences, commissions, and reports that provide a useful issue-oriented context for addressing potential barriers to international information flow. Included were:

-- United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD),
-- 1979 General World Administrative Radio Conference (WARC),
-- French Government's report on computerization in society (Nora Report),
-- Canadian commission report on transborder data flow (Clyne Report),
-- Swedish Government's report on the vulnerability of a computer society,
-- Brazilian licensing and nationalization programs for high technology, and
-- Proposed legislation to revise Title 44 of the U.S. Code involving information dissemination policies.

These items illustrate the potential for increasing restrictions on international data flow and demonstrate that information flows in two ways -- both into and out of the United States.

Issues

-- The lack of both a national and international policy for information,

-- The absence of a central focal point for coordinating information activities within the United States,

-- The lag between technological developments and the response of Government and society,

-- The receipt of 60 percent of materials in U.S. research libraries from abroad,

-- The existence of various copyright, privacy, and data-protection laws,

-- The lack of standards and understanding between industrialized nations and the less developed countries, and

-- The growth of restrictions and special charges by foreign communications regulatory agencies.

Recommendations

-- The United States needs to reexamine its role in the new information world, and the Government must formulate policies that are prospective rather than reactive.

-- The pros and cons of various types of organizations or mechanisms that can coordinate information activities should be discussed.

-- Additional or improved clearinghouses and referral centers should be established (not necessarily by the Government).

-- Funding should be increased to improve information society literacy, to provide continuing education for orienting all persons toward the evolving technological society, and to enhance acquisitions from abroad.

-- National planning for research library resource development should be improved, and better mechanisms for gathering information from abroad should be established.

-- International cooperation should be improved through agreements, treaties, and conventions, and the United States should increase its input to international meetings concerned with drafting such documents. In the light of recent and forthcoming meetings, the United States needs to move quickly.

-- Educational and training programs for less developed countries need to be improved, and an awareness of cultural diversity should be increased.

-- Creative strategies for sharing technologies and information should be promoted.

-- The awareness of the Government and the public regarding potential restrictions on data flow should be increased, and developments in this area should be followed more closely by policymakers, program personnel, and users.

Commentary

-- A need exists to establish a clearinghouse of information for less developed countries. No one place exists in the United States where LDCs can locate needed information.

-- Much of the activity in information production and dissemination is carried on in the private sector without Government support. Any policymaking efforts should include both the public and private sectors.

-- The United States tends to view the free flow of information as a natural process and any barrier that is erected is considered artificial, whereas some countries might see free flow as an unnatural or undesirable situation.

-- As the information age continues to expand, it becomes increasingly valuable to have a basic file of reliable statistics about the growth or lack of information processes around the world, including the flow of data among countries.

-- The era when U.S. information production was predominant is ending, and today there is a better balance of information production and resources throughout the world.

-- In discussing international information flow, it is important to recognize that international communications carriers play an important role along with the foreign communications agencies.

Impact of Current Technology on International Information Exchange

Discussion Group 3 concurred that technology is changing faster than the American public learns about what already exists. The point was made that social change is technology-driven; that in order for society to be "in control," society's awareness of what technology offers has to be increased. The group also emphasized that negative aspects of technology exist, e.g., some LDCs have been frustrated and disillusioned when the promises of technology have been unfulfilled.

Issues

-- The need to minimize the threat of technology, both to other countries and to this Nation, so that technology can be used to its full potential,

-- The possible impact of technology on either increasing or decreasing the availability of information internationally,

-- The importance of establishing standards to facilitate the free flow of information internationally, including efforts to overcome language barriers, and

-- The improved introduction of information technology for bridging cultural gaps,

-- The value of capitalizing on new information technology to improve U.S. economic standing internationally.

Recomendations

-- Mechanisms need to be improved for networking public and educational libraries on a worldwide basis and for enhancing the ability of libraries to become more economically viable.

-- Delegates to the Conference and the public-at-large should be educated about both the use of modern technology in accessing information and the implications of its use.

-- In applying modern information technology, particularly in the less developed world, it is important to consider the most appropriate technology, as is done in industry.

-- The United States should evaluate the types of information wanted from abroad based on the needs of various kinds of users at the Federal, State, and local levels.

-- The types and volumes of transborder data flow should be evaluated to show us where information transfer can be facilitated or should be restricted.

Commentary

-- A dichotomy exists in how technology affects the individual. On the one hand, it can cause a loss of personal identity; on the other hand, it can provide more individuality by facilitating the delivery of customized products and services.

-- Since people are learning to use new online retrieval systems containing recent information they may be losing the larger historical perspective and some of the values represented by more classical scholarly education and research.

-- The United States must address philosophically the problem of whether mechanisms to filter information coming into and going out of the country are desirable or whether the technology should be used instead to interact directly with people abroad.

-- Resource sharing may create fewer, larger resource centers where people can have direct access to information; this would result in greater economies of scale but would also adversely affect the publishing industry.

-- Resource sharing can mean sharing of the surrogate record, rather than the item itself, and thus it may help libraries to become more economically viable without adversely affecting the commercial and scholarly publications sector.

Economic Aspects of International Information Exchange

Discussion Group 4 highlighted the point that information is a valuable resource not only for the intellectual satisfaction it can provide, but because it is an economic commodity and a source of influence. Although the United States has traditionally supported the concept of the free flow of information internationally, that flow is not free in economic terms. The discussion group considered economic implications, particularly, in four categories: barriers, costs, benefits, and opportunities. Barriers include regulatory restrictions, some foreign standards, and prohibitions of certain types of data flow. Costs include tariffs, the expense to U.S. enterprises of the development of foreign networks and other competitive foreign resources, and the outlays by U.S. enterprises in doing business abroad (and thereby spreading their costs more broadly) within a context of increasing regulation and restriction.

Issues

-- The need to increase public awareness of the potential adverse economic effects of transborder data flow regulation for individuals or groups who desire greater access to overseas information,

-- The importance of ensuring that access to foreign information is not lost in the legitimate effort to protect individual privacy and national sovereignty,

-- The importance of evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of standardization, primarily in terms of their economic implications for the United States, and

-- The need to improve the relationship between the public and private sectors regarding the transfer of information and the related economics.

Recommendations

-- The Government should increase Federal subsidization to allow greater participation by U.S. groups -- including the private sector -- in international meetings dealing with transborder data flow.

-- The United States should be cautious in its participation in international standards agreements, particularly as they affect standards that are currently used for large U.S. information systems.

-- In discussing subsidization of information exchange, different approaches should be explored for improving access by developing countries.

-- The Federal Government should evaluate the need for a national policy organization--not necessarily made up solely of Government persons or agencies--which could decide policy concerning Federal information systems.

Commentary

-- Concerns regarding the restrictions on or openness of information flow cannot be addressed independently of privacy, security, economics, and other concerns.

-- Everyone in the information community--even at the rural library level--is affected by the implications of international information issues.

-- It is difficult to estimate the precise economic impact of regulatory controls or tariffs. Improvements in computer hardware and software may offset regulatory increases in the costs to users.

-- In view of the dramatic developments in information processing and communications technology, transfer of information across borders is having an increasing effect on the economic well-being of our Nation and on the costs to U.S. users of library and information services.

-- The United States has been an information-rich society, one vital source of its economic, educational, and research strength; however, potential developments may dispossess the United States of its control and ability to maintain these critical resources, unless a continuing awareness of and concern in the international area are ensured.

Uses and Users of Information Internationally

Discussion Group 5 identified several linking mechanisms that allow two-way exchange of information between the United States and other nations. Among these are:

-- international agencies and their programs,

-- bilateral government agreements,

-- barter and "quid-pro-quo" exchanges between organizations (public and private),

-- sale by information-producing organizations, and

-- "people-to-people" exchange programs.

The group discussed a wide range of topics that are relevant to the overriding question concerning the degree to which information exchange can enhance the foreign posture of the United States while helping to meet the growing need for foreign sources of information.

Issues

-- The need to better comprehend the existence, scope, and scale of the [illegible] information programs in operation,

-- The importance of understanding the impact of U.S. production and the export of information resources on U.S. users in terms of such things as access, costs, and benefits,

-- The improvement of statistics on the current inward flow of information from abroad which may be valuable to U.S. users,

-- The evaluation of information as a resource that can enhance U.S. foreign policy and the degree to which technical assistance should be provided to allow less developed countries to exploit information,

-- The need to assess information requirements of developing country as distinct from those of the United States and Western Europe in order to provide new specialized products and services that will better serve the less developed countries, and

-- The possible creation of a national mechanism for reviewing and coordinating U.S. participation in international information programs, setting priorities, and evaluating benefits to this Nation.

Recommendations

-- U.S. policies that affect participation in international information exchange programs should be more prospective than reactive.

-- More should be done to publicize various activities in which private citizens and organizations can assist in the international exchange of information.

-- More effective international "information-about-information" services are needed to identify relevant new products and services to various user communities.

-- The United States should examine its current and potential bilateral and multilateral information exchange programs, with a view toward improving the acquisition of foreign source materials relevant to programs and address U.S. social, economic, and strategic needs.

-- Increased efforts should be made to publicize the activities of international and regional organizations concerned with the advancement of library and

information sciences and to stimulate professional interest and participation in international developments.

-- Delegates to the Conference should learn how the United States, as a supplier of information products, services, and technology, is viewed by foreign nations (and specified user groups) and what the implications are for this Nation's posture and policies abroad.

Commentary

-- U.S. citizens are seriously lacking in their basic knowledge and awareness of cultural, contemporary, and policital affairs in foreign countries, while people in other nations are more knowledgeable about U.S. issues.

-- Developing countries represent a special class of users for U.S. information products and services, and numerous U.S. objectives are served by providing improved access to needed information by the less developed countries.

-- The United States currently has no specific technical assistance goals and few programs designed to provide information per se to developing nations. As a result, certain basic information needs and infrastructure requirements of LDCs tend to be overlooked in U.S. technical assistance programs.

-- As a Nation, the United States is ahead of many countries in the "technology" of information but behind in the recognition of the social and cultural implications of the emerging "information society" or the "New International Communications and Information Order," as called for by the developing countries.

-- There is an absence of a coordinated national program that defines and articulates U.S. information resources and programs that can be promoted as valuable commodities for exchange or that support foreign policy goals.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Inherent in the findings and recommendations of the five discussion groups is an awareness, amply underscored in the identification of key issues and action options, of the complexities that shape and affect international information flow. Although official Government positions, where they exist, often are a strong if not overriding factor, the interests of multinational corporations and other private sector groups increasingly must be taken into account. Twelve major issues were identified during the deliberations of the five discussion groups.

-- coordination of U.S. information policies with worldwide developments,

-- creation of a mechanism for coordinating U.S. information policies,

-- improvement of information flow to LDCs,

-- improvement of acquisition of foreign materials for this Nation,

-- overcoming restrictions on international data flow,

-- addressing the problem of lag between technology and society's response to it,

-- minimizing threatening aspects of new information technology,

-- assessment of the impact of technology on the availability of information,

-- improvement of standards for facilitating international information flow,

-- improvement of U.S. economic standing through the use of information technology,

-- identification of existing international information programs, and

-- assessment of the impact on U.S. users of exporting information technology.

Considering the focal areas of the five groups, it is not surprising that there was an overlap of emphasis in certain areas, as shown by the reports of the discussion groups. An examination of the purpose and objectives of the White House Conference on Library

and Information Services vis-a-vis this list of international issues is constructive in determining those issues that are of greatest relevance to Conference participants. It would seem that the five priority issues that most closely meet the matching criteria include:

-- coordination of U.S. information policies with worldwide developments,

-- creation of a mechanism for coordinating U.S. information policies,

-- improvement or acquisition of foreign materials for the United States,

-- assessment of the impact of technology on the availability of information, and

-- improvement of standards for facilitating international flow.

The master list of 12 issues also should be kept in mind because it represents a broader spectrum of international activities within the realm of information exchange and utilization that will, in time, have to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

Official cognizance of the need to formulate more definitive, responsive international information policies has been affirmed by the Congress in the Foreign Relations Authoritization Act for Fiscal Year 1979:

> United States Government should have a comprehensive policy regarding the various communications and information issues that have entered international discussions and should establish an effective mechanism by which to develop and coordinate United States policy on such issues.

The need to clarify the role of scientific and technical information in foreign policy was a featured section in the 1978 report by the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology of the House Committee on Science and Technology, entitled Scientific and Technical Information (STI) Activities: Issues and Opportunities. This committee print, in a comment that touches on the broader concerns of the White House Conference, points out that:

> As a result of modern technological developments, the ability to communicate on a global basis and to affect the potential for future economic growth has been enhanced.

The determination of an appropriate strategy for this Nation will result from an assimilation of many viewpoints and contributions, among which may be the recommendations of the White House Conference on Library and Information Services. It will be through initiatives such as these that international policies and programs facilitating the exchange of information can be effected, to the ultimate benefit of individuals and institutions in this country and around the world.